

Bill Fromhold

State Representative

49th District

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CAPITAL LETTER:

A report from
your Legislature

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Dear Fellow Citizen:

Thank you again for the honor and privilege of representing you and our Southwest Washington communities in your State Legislature.

The 2005 Legislature adjourned on time last month with successful passage of a new operating and capital budget for the next two years and a groundbreaking transportation package.

My focus in the Legislature was developing a responsible budget that sustains our economy while advancing opportunities for K-12 and higher education. Southwest Washington achieved many victories, including expansion of WSU Vancouver to four-year status and funding for local transportation projects.

I hope you will contact me with issues or concerns I can work on your behalf. Ann Tjersland, my senior legislative assistant, and I look forward to hearing from you.

Respectfully,

Bill Fromhold
State Representative
49th Legislative District

Operating budget: Achieving results through leadership

Our region is one of the fastest growing in the state, surging in population by 40 percent over 15 years. As individuals and families move to our area, we will see more cars on our roads, more students in our public schools and greater demand for public health and safety.

These mounting regional challenges require an appropriate increase in state services to sustain our community.

We took a strong stand in Olympia this session over those who wanted to maintain the status quo. We approved a new operating budget that provides help for families, children and seniors. My objective was about achieving results that will improve our quality of life and create jobs in Vancouver and Clark County.



JUNE 2005

Representative Bill Fromhold

A responsible budget for a recovering economy

When we convened to write the new budget this year, I worked hard to balance demand for human services without impacting our economic recovery. We agreed on a new state budget that does not include a general tax increase. Instead, modest revenue increases will come from fixes to our estate tax and a tax on cigarettes and hard liquor.

The new revenue provides significant benefits for our community and allows us to:

- Reduce class sizes by fully funding Initiative 728
- Provide a cost of living increase for teachers
- Add 7,900 statewide higher education enrollments
- Expand financial aid so more families can send their children to college
- Provide health care for almost 40,000 uninsured children
- Keep thousands of working adults on the Basic Health Plan who cannot afford to purchase health insurance

Educating our children: A solid foundation

Education is the cornerstone of a solid foundation for life and good-paying jobs. As a former Superintendent for Educational Service District 112 and as a former board member for Clark College as well as a current Washington State University Vancouver Advisory Committee member, I have devoted much of my life's work toward improving education for children.



Our goal in education is graduating students with the skills they need to be successful in life. The Washington Assessment of Student Learning has provided educators an important tool for measuring proficiency in basic skills. The latest results for tenth grade students show an alarming 40 percent passing rate.

Next year's sophomores will be the first class required to pass the WASL before they graduate. Although we have given students four chances to pass the test—that is not the entire solution. We increased support for the Learning Assistance Program to provide after-school, Saturday class and summer school to help students become proficient in reading, writing and math. These skills are critical for success in the workforce and higher education.

Higher education victories

We achieved a great victory for our region with the approval of four-year status for WSU Vancouver. This success will provide more opportunities for our children to earn a college degree.

The Legislature is gearing up for the additional 22,000 citizens that will enter our higher education system by 2010. Statewide the Legislature financed 7,900 new enrollments. Locally this means:

- WSU Vancouver can enroll 200 freshman beginning Fall 2006
- WSU Vancouver can enroll 250 new upper division students
- Clark College receives 210 new enrollment slots

We also expanded financial aid through the State Need Grant to cover families who make 65 percent of the median family income, or about \$43,000 for a family of four. This strengthens our commitment to hard-working students whose families can't afford college tuition. We want to open the door to higher education because a college degree is the key to good-paying jobs in our competitive economy.

CAPITAL LETTER: A report from your Legislature

Capital budget:

The new capital budget invests in schools and community development projects to sustain our growing region.

Washington State University Vancouver and Clark College receive funds to renovate and build modern facilities for world class learning. Students at WSU Vancouver will soon benefit from a new Student Services Center and undergraduate classroom building. Clark College receives funds to renovate Gaiser Hall and create a new east county satellite campus.

The capital budget provides support for a new Center for Community Health, a state-of-the-art facility that will provide services to treat substance abuse and mental health disorders. Clark County Skills Center, the Boys and Girls Club, Vancouver Museum and Lakeshore Park will also receive funds.

These construction projects will benefit families, create jobs and make our community a better place to live.

I believe our needs are urgent and cannot wait. Right now the increase in fuel costs only benefit oil companies and those overseas. The Legislature approved a 3-cent increase in the gas tax this year to put our dollars to work on building new roads to reduce congestion.

We received bipartisan and business support for a total increase of 9.5-cents over four years. This investment pays for the following congestion relief and safety projects:

- Begin work to expand capacity over the Columbia River crossing
- Widen SR 14 to four lanes from 6th Ave to the Washougal city limits
- Widen SR 502 from two to four lanes from I-5 to Battleground
- Construct new interchanges at St. John's Blvd. and NE 54th Avenue
- Connect NE 112th Avenue from the off ramp of northbound I-205 to westbound Mill Plain Boulevard

This transportation solution means we will not let congestion slow down our economy. Commute trip reduction tax credits and new park and ride lots will also appeal to new businesses and help fuel our job market.

Transportation: Providing relief for motorists

When we must plan our daily lives around rush hour, it is time to find a solution before our transportation challenges worsen.

More people moved to Clark County than anywhere else in Washington State since the 2000 census—almost 50,000 more people. A recent traffic study ranks the greater Portland area, which includes our roadways, ninth worst in the nation for the rush-hour commute.



Election reform:

The public demanded reforms to restore integrity and trust in our election system. We responded by passing legislation recommended by a task force led by Secretary of State Sam Reed.

A new statewide database will eliminate voting from ineligible felons, deceased people and voting in multiple counties. Consistent standards will be set across the state to verify and count ballots. Provisional ballots will be distinct from regular ballots by color. Voter identification at the polls will prevent unauthorized voting.

I am concerned that the Senate did not act to move the primary date so we have adequate time to send ballots to military and absentee voters. This will be a top priority for next session.



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Health care: Security for families and seniors

Families and seniors are struggling to keep up with health care and prescription drug costs. A lapse in coverage can put a family and especially children at risk. I believe in early and preventive treatment rather than letting illnesses result in emergency room visits later.

Taking care of our most vulnerable citizens is a moral responsibility. The new budget does just that for:

- Families – low-income adults and uninsured children will receive medical coverage
- Seniors – strengthens in-home care for seniors
- Mental health – restores lost federal funding to treat teens and adults with chemical dependencies and mental illnesses

We also passed several prescription drug reforms to provide affordable medications through bulk purchasing and access to drugs from Canada.

Budgeting for the future:


I believe in balanced, sustainable budgets to run state government. I was pleased that the Governor signed legislation to make state government accountable to the people of Washington. Performance audits will save taxpayer dollars and create more efficient budgets.

I also believe we must honor our commitment to current and future retirees. Educators, police officers and other public employees depend on our pension system for a secure future. I will continue to advocate for responsible pension policies to guarantee the solvency of this promise.

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